

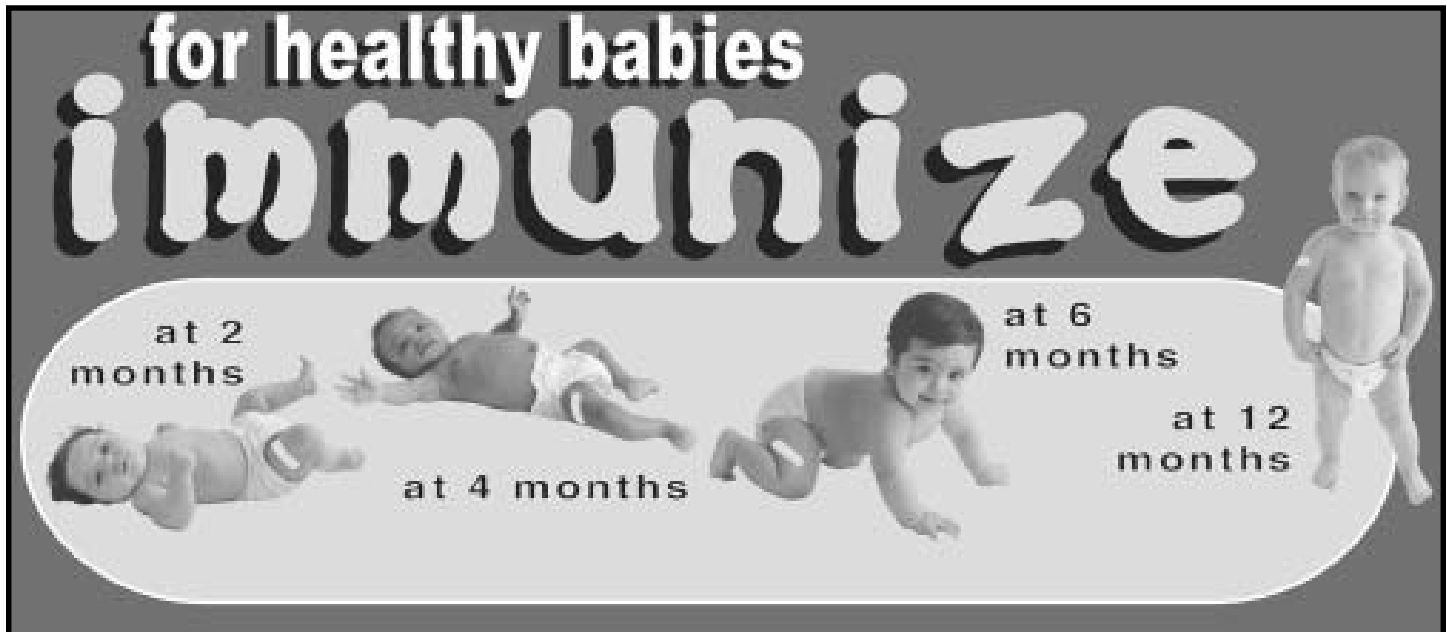
Houston Health

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Houston Department of
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A Quarterly Newsletter for Advisory Councils of the Houston Department of Health and Human Services

Focus on vaccinations



Making children stronger

***Educating parents about the importance of immunizations
helps safeguard children from preventable deaths, disabilities***

Every month about 3,730 babies are born in Houston.

The figure underscores the never-ending need to educate parents about the role that timely immunizations play in keeping children healthy. August is National Immunization Awareness Month.

Immunizations, also called vaccinations or shots, help keep children safe from diseases that can cause premature deaths and an array of illnesses such as pneumonia, meningitis, seizures, paralysis, encephalitis, brain and liver damage, heart problems and blood, joints, bones and ear infections. They also protect the entire community by reducing the spread of viruses and bacteria that cause infectious diseases.

The diseases that can cause numerous disabilities or

even the death of a child – and which immunizations easily prevent – are hepatitis B, diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis (whooping cough), H. influenza type b, pneumococcal disease, polio, measles, mumps, rubella and varicella (chicken pox). They once were commonplace and each killed thousands of children in the United States.

It is recommended that children receive 80 percent of the vaccinations they will need in their lifetime by age 2. Children are most susceptible to contagious and deadly diseases from birth to 2 years of age because they have yet to develop the antibodies necessary to fight off diseases. The vaccinations provide immunity before the child has been exposed to disease-causing bacteria or viruses. Essentially, the vaccinations make children stronger.

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Misconceptions undermine immunization rate

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Children, in a span of five visits to a doctor or a health clinic, need to receive roughly 20 vaccinations by the time they are 2 years old. Some children receive as many as five vaccinations in a single visit. It is recommended that parents take an infant to the family's doctor or health clinic for immunizations at 2, 4, 6, 12 and 15 months of age.

Immunizations are easily accessible in the Houston area. The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDDHHS) has 19 immunization sites, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services operates 17 sites, about 750 private health care providers offer low-cost vaccines through participation in the federal Vaccines for Children program and many other primary care sites provide immunizations.

Every year the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conducts a national immunization survey and last year estimated Houston had a rate of 71 percent for up-to-date immunizations in children age 19 to 35 months old. While Houston's immunization rate falls below the national average of 79 percent, it has increased significantly since the 11 percent estimate in 1991. The city's rate rose to 31 percent in 1993 and has ranged from the mid 60s to low 70s since 1994. Eventually, 98 percent of Houston children receive the needed vaccinations because of mandatory immunization requirements to enroll in school.

A lack of education about immunizations on the part of parents is one of the factors that contribute to the city's low immunization rate.

Since there has been an absence of major outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in recent years, a large number of parents—especially those who are young and have not

 is the recommended age to receive a vaccine.
 is an acceptable age range to receive a vaccine.
 needs to be given if the child missed previously recommended doses.

AGE ► VACCINE ▼	Birth	1 month	2 months	4 months	6 months	12 months	15 months	18 months	24 months	4-6 years	11-12 years	14-18 years
Hep B Hepatitis B												
DTaP Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis												Td
Hib Haemophilus influenzae type b												
IPV Polio												
PCV Pneumococcal Conjugate Vaccine												
MMR Measles, mumps, and rubella												
Var Varicella zoster												
Hep A Hepatitis A												

Source: Reprinted by permission of the National Alliance for Hispanic Health, 2003

seen first hand the devastation that diseases can cause—may now mistakenly believe that immunizations are not necessary. Also, the complex vaccination schedule, which calls for several doses of a particular vaccine at different ages and catch-up vaccinations if a child misses timely immunizations, might be confusing for some parents.

What's more, newly introduced vaccinations create additional confusion for parents. The pneumococcal vaccine, for example, was recently licensed for children under 2. Previously, the only pneumococcal vaccine available was not effective for young children and mostly recommended for adults at least 65 years old. And just late last year, the CDC for the first time began advising that whenever feasible parents vaccinate

children between the ages of 6 months and 23 months against the flu. Deaths due to the flu are rare in babies and toddlers – most who die are 65 or older – but otherwise healthy children are at increased risk for influenza-related hospitalizations. The flu also can cause pneumonia and ear and sinus infections.

Vaccines are among the safest medicines available, although some parents still worry about the safety of vaccination. Some common side effects are soreness at the site of injection or a low fever. As with any medicine, there is a small risk that adverse events could occur after getting a vaccine. However, the risks from vaccines are much smaller than the risks from the diseases that vaccines help prevent.

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Providers can help raise immunization awareness

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Education is also essential for health care providers. They must receive training on best practices that include taking full advantage of all opportunities to vaccinate, and dispelling the myths that children can't receive immunizations with a mild fever or that they can only receive one or two shots at a time. Health care providers can play a key role in helping raise awareness among parents about the health benefits provided by immunizations. They also can provide appropriate responses to concerns that parents may have about receiving all necessary immunizations.

Three years ago, HDHHS, Texas Children's Hospital and a group of local organizations introduced the Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry to address the local problems of record fragmentation and limited access to accurate information about immunization records. The registry, an Internet-based system designed to serve as a confidential electronic record containing information on locally vaccinated youths,



currently stores nearly 5 million individual immunization records. (*See related article page 6*)

Until the introduction of the registry, there was no way to easily follow the immunization status of children who, for example, received one vaccination from a public health nurse, another from a private doctor

and yet another at one of the many immunization events sponsored by grocery stores, shopping malls, etc. HDHHS is using the registry as a tool to improve local immunization coverage.

Vaccination is one of the most important ways parents can protect their children's health.

Vaccination program at shopping malls in August

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services will provide vaccinations to children heading off to school at four local shopping malls weekdays in August from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The malls and their addresses are:

- **Northwest Mall**
9800 Hempstead Highway
- **Northline Mall**
4400 North Freeway
- **Sharpstown Center**
7500 Bellaire Boulevard
- **Almeda Mall**
12200 Gulf Freeway

A designated number of appointment tickets will be issued daily at each of the sites. The tickets will be distributed on a first come, first served basis and based on site capacity. Parents should take to the vaccination site their children's immunization records and Medicaid card if applicable.

Vaccines most frequently needed by children before going to school are a combined shot for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough) and another for measles, mumps and rubella. Children are unable to complete the school registration

process until they have met all immunization requirements.

Cost is \$3 per child.

The department's health centers and community immunization sites will not offer vaccinations in August during the vaccination program at the shopping malls.

Recorded information about the immunization sites will be available starting August 2 at 713-247-2411 in English and at 713-247-2412 in Spanish. For more information, call the city's information line 311 or the department's Immunization Bureau at 713-794-9267.

Adult vaccines prevent hospitalizations, deaths

Most adults do not spend much time thinking about immunizations, but getting the recommended adult immunizations is one of the most effective ways adults can remain healthy.

Vaccines help prevent diseases that can result in serious medical complications, hospitalizations or even death.

Approximately 36,000 people die annually due to influenza and its complications. Pneumococcal infections result in the deaths of 6,000 to 7,000 people every year. Hepatitis B causes another 4,000 to 5,000 adult deaths each year.

Below are the vaccines that all adults need.

Tetanus-diphtheria (Td) vaccine

Recommended as a booster every 10 years, after an initial series of three shots.

Almost all reported cases of tetanus occur in persons who have never been vaccinated or those who have completed a primary series of shots but have not had a booster vaccination in the past 10 years. Diphtheria can lead to breathing problems, heart failure, paralysis and sometimes death.

Measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine

For persons without a history of measles, mumps and rubella vaccination in their medical records, two doses of MMR vaccine are recommended for all adults born after 1956. Two doses are also recommended for health care personnel, travelers to countries where measles is common and adults entering post-secondary institutions (colleges and vocational schools). Records would encompass vaccination, actual disease, or serological testing. Rubella is of particular concern during pregnancy as it can result in severe birth defects, miscarriages and stillbirths.



Influenza

An annual flu shot is recommended for everyone 50 years of age or older, residents of long-term care facilities housing people with chronic medical conditions, anyone whose immune system is weakened, anyone 6 months to 18 years of age on long-term aspirin treatment and women who will be past the third month of pregnancy during the flu season. Most people are ill with the flu for only a few days, but some get much sicker and may need to be hospitalized. Influenza causes thousands of deaths each year, mostly among the elderly.

Varicella (chickenpox) vaccine

Recommended for those not previously vaccinated and for those who have no reliable history of having the disease. Teachers of young children and day care workers, residents and staff in institutional settings, military personnel, nonpregnant women of childbearing age, students living in dormitories, international travelers, health care workers and family members or

household contacts of immunocompromised persons or young children are at increased risk if they are unvaccinated or have never had the disease. Adults are 10 times more likely than children to develop severe complications when infected with chickenpox virus.

Meningococcal vaccine

Suggested by many colleges for incoming students. Meningococcal disease results from infection of the fluids surrounding the brain and spinal cord. Symptoms can include high fever, headache and stiff neck; 10 percent to 15 percent of cases are fatal. This vaccine is important for college students, particularly those living in dormitories, who have a higher risk of getting meningococcal meningitis than the general population.

Pneumococcal vaccine

Recommended for all adults 65 or older, as well as persons aged 19–64 years with diabetes or chronic heart, lung, liver or kidney disorders. Also recommended for Alaskan natives

See Recommended, Page 5

Recommended shots help adults remain healthy

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and certain American Indian populations, residents of nursing homes and other long-term care facilities. Pneumococcal disease causes 6,000 to 7,000 deaths each year in the United States. Half of these deaths could be prevented through use of the pneumococcal vaccine.

Hepatitis A vaccine

Recommended for adults who have chronic liver disease or clotting-factor disorders such as hemophilia,

use injecting or non-injecting illegal drugs, travel to developing countries where hepatitis A is common, work in hepatitis A virus research labs or work with hepatitis A infected animals. Also recommended for men who have sex with men. Hepatitis A virus infected an estimated 180,000 Americans in 1997 and about 100 people die from it each year.

Hepatitis B vaccine

Recommended for adults in certain high-risk groups, such as health

care workers, persons with multiple sex partners or who have recently acquired a sexually transmitted disease, men who have sex with men, users of illegal injection drugs and family members of adoptees from countries where hepatitis B is common. The hepatitis B virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. This disease can cause long-term liver damage and leads to more than 5,000 deaths each year in the United States.

HDHHS vaccination sites relocate to WIC clinics

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS) has relocated many of its immunization community sites to Women Infants and Children (WIC) clinics.

The change allows HDHHS to increase hours of operation from 115 hours to a total of 246 hours of access every week and schedule eight additional immunization sessions while consolidating

community sites from 26 to 11.

Relocation of community sites also will enable HDHHS to better target immunization efforts to children under five years of age and primarily to children under 2 who are most susceptible to vaccine-preventable diseases and their deadly effects.

WIC provides health care referrals, nutrition education and nutritious foods to pregnant, breastfeeding and postpartum women and

children under 5 who have nutrition health-related problems.

For more information, call 713-794-9267 or the city's information line 311.

New immunization sites, their locations and hours of operation are listed below.

(Note: The sites will be closed in August due to back to school vaccinations at local malls.)

Spring Woods Baptist Church, 10131 Emnora
Mondays 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

Walgreen's Drugs, 215 West 20th
Mondays 8:30 am – 3:30 pm

Morris Frank Library, 6440 West Bellfort
Tuesdays 9 am – 4 pm
Vinson Library, 3100 West Fuqua
Wednesdays 9 am – 4 pm

Gulfton HPD, 5980 Renwick
Fridays 10 am – 4 pm

Kingwood HPD, 3915 Rustic Wood
Saturdays 9 am – 12:30 pm

Alief WIC Center, 6787 Wilcrest Dr.
Mondays 10:30 am – 7:30 pm
Tuesdays, Thursdays 8:30 am – 4 pm
Wednesdays 8:30 am – 7:30 pm
Fridays, Saturdays 8:30 am – 11 am

Braesner WIC Center, 8832 S. Braeswood
Tuesdays 1:30 pm – 4 pm
Wednesday – Saturday 8:30 am – 4 pm

Southwest WIC Center, 6121 Hillcroft
Mondays 1:30 PM – 7:30 pm
Tuesdays, Thursdays 8:30 am – 7:30 pm
Wednesdays, Saturdays 8:30 am – 4 pm
Fridays 8:30 am – 11 am

Northeast WIC Center, 9421 Mesa Dr.
Mondays (alternating), Tuesdays,
Wednesdays, Fridays 8:30 am – 4 pm
Thursdays 10:30 am – 7 pm
Saturdays (2nd & 4th only) 8:30 am – 4 pm

Northwest WIC Center, 8536 Hammerly
Mondays (alternating), Wednesdays,
Thursdays, Fridays 7:30 am – 4 pm
Tuesdays 10:30 am – 7 pm
Saturday (2nd & 4th only) 8:30 am – 4 pm

Immunization registry nearing 5 million mark

The Houston-Harris County Immunization Registry is approaching a milestone — its 5 millionth entry.

The registry is an Internet-based system designed to serve as a confidential electronic archive containing information on locally vaccinated children ranging in age from birth to 17 years.

If the registry's nearly 5 million immunization records were lined up, they would extend more than a mile in length. If they were piled on top of each other, the stack would be taller than six Williams Towers.

It is recommended that children receive 80 percent of their lifetime vaccinations by age 2 to protect against 12 potentially deadly diseases.

The Houston Department of Health and Human Services (HDHHS), Texas Children's Hospital and a group of local organizations introduced the registry three years ago as a way of addressing the area's low immunization coverage rate and the problems with record fragmentation and limited access to accurate information on immunization records.

The immunization coverage level in Houston for children age 19 to 35 months is currently 71 percent. The figure is derived from an annual Centers for Disease Control and Prevention survey tallying children who have received four immuniza-

tions for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis (whooping cough), three immunizations for polio and one immunization for measles, mumps and rubella. Houston's immunization rate falls below the national average of 79 percent.

The lack of, or incomplete, documentation of vaccinations administered to Houston-area children is a major contributing issue to low immunization coverage levels. Without a complete and consolidated record, there is no easy way to follow or accurately assess the immunization status of local children. The problem is compounded if parents fail to present their children's immunization records when they change health care providers, who already lack an efficient mechanism to verify vaccination for new patients without documentation.

Over-immunization aggravates the immunization challenge. Parents sometimes lose the records for their children, who then might be vaccinated with unneeded extra doses. The registry will help with the problem by preventing over vaccination, which has no health benefit and only results in an additional medical cost.

As a centralized record-storage space, the registry provides participating physicians, clinics and hospitals the capability to review the informa-

tion on each child in the system and calculate when the next immunizations are due. It also makes it easy for them to send to families immunization reminders in the form of post cards or personal phone calls. A quality assessment feature of the registry generates reports aimed at helping health care providers identify areas of improvement in their immunization delivery practices.

Since 2001 the number of children with immunization information in the registry has increased from 473,210 to more than 700,000. This represents more than a 40 percent increase in participation.

Every month HDHHS health centers input the immunization records of about 5,000 children into the registry database. Kelsey-Seybold clinics and Texas Children's Pediatric Associates will begin using the registry daily this summer. Kelsey-Seybold serves more than 230,000 children while Texas Children's Hospital serves more than 45,000.

The final web version of the registry is nearing completion and recruiting of private providers into the system will begin soon.

A variety of public and private organizations such as hospital systems, public health agencies, business partners and foundations helped HDHHS introduce the registry or contributed to its progress. They include Baylor College of Medicine, Cullen Foundation, Hewlett-Packard Company, Kelsey-Seybold, Memorial Hermann Children's Hospital, Rockwell Fund, Texas Children's Pediatric Associates, Texas Department of Health and World Health and Golf Association. The HHCIR Development Group, a not-for-profit support group comprised of community organizations, also contributed to the development of the registry.

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